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Summer 1983

Food News for Consumers

United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service:

- Inspects and analyzes domestic and imported meat, poultry, and meat and poultry food products;
- Establishes standards and approves recipes and labels for processed meat and poultry products; and
- Monitors the meat and poultry industries for violations of inspection laws.

The 1983 Bumper Crop of Children's Posters

Seventy thousand posters -- a bumper crop! That is the record-breaking number of children's posters received by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for its 1983 food safety poster contest--more than twice the participation in 1982. The first contest was held in 1981.

The poster contest, sponsored by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, teaches safe food handling and is aimed at preventing food poisoning. Using specially designed kits, teachers cover food safety themes with their classes. Then, the students draw posters showing what they've learned. This year's theme was food storage and handling, plus product label reading.

The 1983 contest reached an estimated half million grade school children and attracted 70,000 entries. The winning posters were chosen for their originality, attractiveness, readability (posters must communicate at a distance) and strong food safety message.

First prize this year was a \$200 U.S. Savings Bond and a trip to Washington, D.C., for the winners and their parents. The teachers of first-prize winners also won \$200 bonds. Second-prize winners and their teachers received \$100 bonds. Third-prize winners and their teachers won \$50 bonds.

AND THE WINNERS! 1983 first-prize winners are: Jennifer Agnello, 7, from Lewiston-Porter North Elementary School in Youngstown, N.Y., in the grades 1-2 division; Melinda Hayes, 8, from Mercy Montessori Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, grades 3-4; and Robert Lucci, 11, of Campus North School in Buffalo, N.Y., grades 5-6.

Second-prize winners are: Mark Menezes, 7, Wilson School, East Providence, R.I., grades 1-2; Jason CanneLongo, 10, Temple Christian School, Newark, Del., grades 3-4; and Ali Ayes, 12, Atkinson Elementary School, Fremont, Ohio, grades 5-6.

Third-prize winners are: Christopher Dearie, 8, The Alexander Robertson School, New York, N.Y., grades 1-2; Claire Bittman, 9, Signal Mountain Elementary School, Signal Mountain, Tenn., grades 3-4; and Tammy Seabolt, 11, Holton Elementary School, Holton, Mich., grades 5-6.

Prize money was contributed by USDA's employee group, the Welfare and Recreation Association, the National Pork Producers Council, the American Meat Institute and the National Broiler Council.

For more information, see Press Release #532-83, "USDA Names Winners in 3rd Annual Food Safety Poster Contest" (5-24-83). Photographs of the winning entries are available from: USDA, Photography Division, Rm. 4407-S, Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: (202)447-6633.



USDA Proposes to Update Rules for Processing Pork



USDA has proposed to update requirements for pork processing procedures that destroy any trichinae organisms that may be present in ready-to-eat pork products.

Trichinae are microscopic parasites that live in the muscles of swine and some other animals such as bears and racoons. People can contract trichinosis from infected meat if it's eaten raw, undercooked or improperly processed. Although hogs slaughtered in the United States are rarely infected -- the estimate is 0.125 percent (slightly more than one-tenth of one percent) -- the infection can be serious. That's why USDA requires processors to cook, freeze or use salt in the curing of ready-to-eat pork products so that the organisms, if any, are destroyed.

The proposal would adjust the time-and-temperature processing requirements for meat plants that freeze or salt-cure pork products such as luncheon meats, hams and pork shoulder picnics. The proposal does not affect products in which cooking is the method for trichina control.

The proposed changes have proven effective in studies conducted by USDA, universities and the pork processing industry. USDA studies, for example, show that dry or semi-dry sausages, like pepperoni and hard salami, can be safely made with less salt than is currently required. Therefore, the proposal would permit a decrease in salt from 3.3 percent (by weight) to 2.0 percent, but only if drying time is increased.

For more information, see Press Release #233-83, "USDA Proposes to Update Rules for Processing Pork," (3-9-83) and the Background Paper, "USDA Proposes to Update its Rules for Trichina Control" (March 1983).

Food Regulations — A Long History

Food regulation hits the newspapers often these days -- consumers are fighting for quality controls, government closes down an unsanitary packing plant, a manufacturer is sued because someone found glass in their food. Is all this controversy because food regulation is an exclusively twentieth-century phenomenon?

Not at all. Food regulation goes way back. There is evidence of strict food regulation in the Bible -- the early Hebrews had a formalized set of meat rejection standards and a humane-slaughter code. The Romans, great makers of civil law, regarded regulation of the food supply as one of the most important functions of government. After all, they reasoned, if you couldn't ensure a sufficient, safe food supply, you couldn't rule.

The Romans considered the selling of food a vital occupation. Their civil code says this about hog dealers: "As dealers in hogs in the Eternal City are engaged in an occupation advantageous to the Roman people, they shall forever be exempt from the performance of ignoble services."

Early English law is also full of food regulations, most of them directed at staple foods people had quit making at home and started buying -- bread, butter, cheese, meat, fish, wine and ale. By the 13th century, English law contained fairly inclusive rules about the manufacture of both bread and ale, the staffs of life. The old English food laws had teeth in them too. For breaking the bread laws, a baker could be sent to the stocks, and for breaking the ale statutes, a brewer could be confined to the tumbrel (strapped to chair and left in front of his shop, where the crowd would jeer and throw things).

In colonial Virginia and Massachusetts -- two of the most "progressive" American colonies -- there were also many laws on the books concerning safe foods. They were strictly enforced. A Virginia law, passed in 1632, defined the legal size of corn barrels, and set a penalty of the pillory or stocks for using unsealed corn barrels. The intent here was probably to keep the corn clean, dry and free from rodents or other pests.

Tobacco, an important cash crop, was literally a "burning" issue for the early Virginians. Any tobacco merchant found mixing his fine quality tobacco with small stones or tobacco stalks to add weight could have his barrels of tobacco burned.

By the early twentieth century, then, when the first sweeping federal food laws were passed in this country -- there were already three hundred years of colonial and state laws on the books!

Present food regulation, of course, is somewhat more sophisticated than in early England when "putrid pigeon and other carrion" were burned under the noses of dishonest meat dealers confined to the stocks. Most of the progress made in this century toward ensuring a safe food supply is due to the commitment of government, consumers and the food industry.

USDA Keeps Adulterated Veal Out of Food Channels

USDA condemned 93 veal calf carcasses in New York State in March because the meat was adulterated with diethylstilbestrol (DES) -- a synthetic hormonal growth promotant. DES use in livestock was banned by the Food and Drug Administration in 1979.

The condemnation came before the veal left the packing house and was linked to court action FDA initiated against four New York veal producers. All four signed consent agreements in court stipulating they will not use DES or market DES-treated animals, and they agreed to pay for government testing of calves on their farms. Under the court orders, if DES is confirmed in any carcass an entire lot from these producers could be condemned.

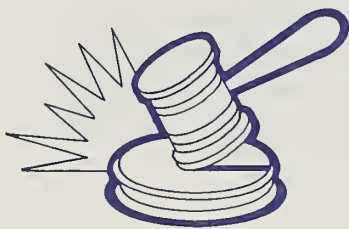
FSIS is screening calves from all federally inspected plants to determine the extent of use of DES and other estrogenic hormones. The screening, which began in April and will extend through August 1983, uses a new test that allows pathologists to quickly examine sections of calf prostate glands for cellular changes caused by these hormones.

In cases where the cellular change occurs, the calves will be traced back to the farm where they were raised. Then USDA scientists will contact the producer to find out what compound was used and analyze additional calf tissues for residues.

For more information, see Press Release #281-83, "USDA Keeps Adulterated Veal Out of Consumer Channels" (3-18-83).

Meat Producer Fined \$11,550 for Attempt to Influence Inspector

On May 19, Thomas J. Burke, president of Great American Veal, Inc., Newark, N.J., was found guilty of 23 counts of supplementing the income of a USDA official. The U.S. District Court in Newark fined him \$11,550 -- \$500 for each count -- and sentenced him to three years probation on each of the 23 counts.



In 1978, Michael Gabriel -- a veterinarian with USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service -- reported to USDA's Office of the Inspector General that Burke was offering him funds to relax the enforcement of USDA inspection requirements. After reporting the incident, the Office of the Inspector General instructed Gabriel to accept payment so that evidence could be gathered to support a criminal action.

The payments amounted to over \$5,000 during a year and half period. However, Gabriel ensured that no unwholesome meat ever entered the food supply. Gabriel recently received USDA's Special Achievement Award for his role in aiding the investigation.

Five in Pennsylvania Sentenced in Diseased Meat Scheme

A U.S. District Court in Pittsburgh on April 22 sentenced five Pennsylvania residents for their part in a scheme involving the slaughtering and selling of meat from diseased cattle that had not been inspected by USDA. The cattle had cancerous tumors of the eye and other suspected diseases. A jury found all five guilty March 4 of conspiracy to violate federal meat inspection laws and related crimes associated with the clandestine operation.

The court handed down the following sentences: Hughey P. Weyandt, owner of Weyandt's and Sons, Claysburg, Pa., to five years in prison and five years probation and a fine of \$31,000; Jerome Davis, owner of Jerry Davis Packing Co., Dysart, Pa., to four years in prison and five years probation; Janet Davis, wife of Jerome Davis, to a three-year suspended sentence and five years probation; Isaiah Fleck, a Weyandt employee, to four years in prison and four years probation. Barry Weyandt, Hughey Weyandt's nephew and a minor, was placed under the jurisdiction of the federal Youth Correction Act. Officials have not yet determined his sentence.

The illegal slaughter and stamping occurred at the Weyandt plant after normal work hours when federal inspectors were not present and at the Davis plant, a custom slaughter operation that did not require daily federal inspection. Information stemming from the Dec. 17 indictments of the five individuals revealed that some of the meat was transported to Philadelphia. However, USDA assured public health officials in Pennsylvania that there was no evidence any of the suspect meat remained in commerce, nor was any human food-poisoning illness associated with the product. Humans cannot contract cancer from eating meat from animals with cancer. A federal grand jury in Pittsburgh is continuing its investigation of the case.

For more information, see FSIS Press Release (5-3-83), "Five in Pennsylvania Sentenced in Diseased Meat Caper."

Ground Pork to Match Ground Beef Standard

On April 13, 1983, USDA proposed to make composition standards for ground pork products nearly identical to those now in effect for ground beef and hamburger.

If the proposal is accepted as a final rule, products such as ground and chopped pork and pork burgers could contain only chopped fresh or frozen pork plus pork fat and seasonings.

The pork fat content would be limited to 30 percent, and ground pork could not contain added water, binders, extenders or phosphates. Phosphates are added to meat products to promote the retention of natural juices in cooking. Ground pork could not contain mechanically separated pork.

For pork patties, however, the ingredients list would be broader. In addition to chopped fresh or frozen pork, pork fat and seasonings, pork patties could contain binders or extenders, mechanically separated pork (used according to USDA regulation) and partially defatted pork fatty tissue. Water may be added, too, but only in amounts that preserve a patty's "meat" character.

The changes were requested by the National Pork Producers Council to assure consumers of consistently high-quality, limited-fat ground pork products.

For more information, see Press Release #393-83, "USDA Proposes New Ingredient Standards for Pork, Beef Products" (4-12-83).

Speedier Test for USDA's Bacon Monitoring Program



USDA is now using a faster procedure in its laboratories to confirm the presence of nitrosamines in bacon. The new procedure saves money because it takes four days instead of eight and requires less labor than the previous test -- but gives comparable results.

Every week since December 1978, USDA has been testing bacon samples for nitrosamines and reporting results to the public. The testing program is for the most common type of bacon, made by "pumping" pork bellies with liquid cures. Pumped bacon accounts for nearly 99 percent of the bacon sold in this country.

When the preliminary test of a bacon sample (done by thermal energy analyzer) shows nitrosamine levels above certain points, USDA collects additional samples for testing. To confirm the presence of nitrosamines, gas chromatography and mass spectrometry testing is done. The new method extracts nitrosamines from fried bacon for the confirmatory test.

For more information, see Press Release #474-83, "USDA Speeds Procedure for Confirming Nitrosamines in Bacon" (5-4-83).

USDA Closes Door on Unsafe Meat and Poultry Imports

USDA has adopted stringent measures to prevent rejected meat and poultry imports from illegally entering U.S. commerce. The final regulations slightly modify emergency interim rules USDA implemented in August 1982.

USDA adopted the interim rules after finding in the spring of 1982 that some imported product rejected by USDA had still managed to enter the U.S. market. Acting on that knowledge, USDA immediately tightened procedures for the marking, handling and re-exporting of refused-entry meat and poultry.

Federal laws on meat and poultry imports, cooperatively enforced by USDA and the U.S. Customs Service, provide that any product that is refused entry must either be treated to prevent its use as human food or exported from the United States.

While federal import inspection has worked well in protecting consumers from undesirable meat and poultry products, there are still those who try to use loopholes to move rejected product into commerce.

To prevent such abuses, the final rule amends the meat and poultry inspection regulations to prohibit:

- The "pre-stamping" by USDA inspectors of "U.S. Inspected and Passed" markings on any product until all USDA inspections are completed;
- The dividing of lots of refused-entry products into smaller lots for separate disposition;
- The sale of refused-entry product, except to foreign consignees for re-export, or, with Food and Drug Administration approval, to U.S. companies for use as animal food;
- The movement of refused-entry product from port to port without full written information on the product's disposition; and
- The movement of any refused-entry product except under security seals.

The final rule also extends from 30 to 45 days the deadline for owners or consignees of rejected product to export it or to treat it to prevent its use as human food. This time limit can be extended only under extreme emergencies, such as a dock strike or the lack of a vessel for transport. If the importer or consignee does not properly dispose of the rejected product within the time limit, USDA is authorized to take appropriate action to destroy it.

For more information, see Press Release #391-83, "USDA Adopts String Controls for Rejected Meat and Poultry Imports" (4-12-83).

Czechoslovakia Ineligible to Export Meat to the U.S.

USDA has removed Czechoslovakia from the list of countries eligible to export meat to the United States. The action followed the removal of three Czechoslovakian processing plants from the list of approved meat exporters to the United States because their canned hams contained violative levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's). The Czechoslovakian meat inspection system has been unable to control PCB residues in canned hams despite repeated notification about the problem by USDA.

In early April, shipments of Czechoslovakian canned hams were halted after PCB residues were found during routine residue monitoring. All Czechoslovakian hams awaiting entry into the United States, as well as those still in transit, were ordered held at port-of-entry for testing. Hams already distributed were not recalled since previously imported product had been tested for residues and found acceptable.

Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act only those countries which have meat inspection systems at least equal to the U.S. system are permitted to ship meat to the United States. Individual plants within an eligible country must also be certified as eligible to export. A foreign country may be removed from the list of eligible exporters when the controls or programs within its meat inspection system are not up to U.S. standards. Eligibility to export to the United States will be restored as soon as the Czechoslovakian government corrects the problem.

In 1982, the United States imported approximately 3.36 million pounds of canned hams from Czechoslovakia -- less than one percent of the almost two billion pounds of meat imported last year.

For more information, see Press Releases #384-83, "USDA Halts Meat Imports from Czechoslovakia" (4-8-83) and #449-83, "USDA Removes Czechoslovakia from List of Eligible Exporters" (4-28-83).

Other FSIS News

USDA withdraws inspection from Morrilton, Ark., slaughter plant. Press Release #361-83 (4-5-83).

Kansas firm recalls more salami because of glass fragments. Press Release #434-83 (4-22-83).

USDA raises sale exemption for meat products. Press Release #428-83 (4-25-83).

How to Obtain Free Copies

Single free copies of press releases, Federal Register reprints, studies, fact sheets, and publications mentioned in the FSIS section of this newsletter are available from FSIS Public Awareness, Room 1163-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: (202) 447-9351.

Who can Answer Your Questions

If you have a question or a problem with the safety or wholesomeness of a meat or poultry product, or the truthfulness of its labeling, contact FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250 or call (202) 472-4485.

Where to Send Comments

Send your comments on proposals in the FSIS section to: Regulations Coordination Division, Room 2637-S, FSIS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Usually two copies are requested. Be sure to identify the proposal you are commenting on by referring to the title of informal proposals or, for formal proposals, the date of publication in the Federal Register.

USDA's Agricultural Research Service:

- Conducts research to fulfill the diverse needs of agricultural users — from farmers to consumers — in the areas of:
 - Crop and animal production, protection, processing, and distribution;
 - Food safety and quality; and
 - Natural resources conservation.

Low Fat Diet — A Treatment for Hypertension?

Can high blood pressure be treated solely by changing the foods we eat? Researchers at USDA's Western Human Nutrition Research Center, in Presidio, Calif., may soon find out. They plan to study the possibility of lowering high blood pressure -- also called hypertension -- through a low fat diet rather than by medication, the principal approach recommended by doctors today. Hypertension is a major risk factor in cardiovascular diseases, which account for almost half of the deaths in the United States.

Twelve men, ages 40 to 60 -- the group most prone to hypertension -- will be housed and fed at the center for 100 days. For the first 20 days of the study, the diets for all twelve will include about 42 percent fat, typical of the average American diet. Later, six of the group will be placed on a low fat diet -- one which includes only 25 percent fat -- for 40 days. The remainder of the group will remain on the average "42 percent fat" diet. At the end of that 40-day period, the two groups will reverse roles. The men will be checked throughout these periods for changes in blood pressure.

Since salt can affect blood pressure, all 12 men during the study will consistently consume 12 grams of salt daily, the average amount in an American diet. The men also will maintain their usual body weights and exercise levels so that any changes in blood pressure can be attributed solely to diet.

Earlier studies by researchers in Finland found that low fat diets reduced blood cholesterol 25 to 40 percent, lowering blood pressure significantly. These studies, however, were done on a "free-living" basis -- where subjects were given diets to follow at home. Because these were not strictly controlled conditions, the results have been controversial.

For more information on this study, contact: James Iacano, Western Human Nutrition Research Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture, LAIR Bldg. 1110, Rm. LR 3142, Presidio, Calif. 94129.

Mother's Milk Goes Further



If you think that mother's milk is better for infants than formula milk, you might be right. A study by USDA's Agricultural Research Service found that breast-fed infants grow just as quickly as formula-fed infants, although the breast-fed children consume less protein and energy.

Apparently, infants are able to use the protein and energy in mother's milk much more efficiently than the nutrients in formula milk. Despite lower food consumption after the first month of life, breast-fed infants gain weight at the same rate as formula-fed infants.

USDA researchers recently studied milk consumption and growth rates for 45 exclusively breast-fed infants. By four months of age, the breast-fed infants consumed about 25 percent fewer calories than formula-fed infants. Similarly,

their protein intakes were appreciably less than those of formula-fed babies, even though the protein-to-calorie ratios of commercial milk formulas are similar to human milk.

The research was done at Texas Children's Hospital, Houston, Tex., and at USDA's Children's Nutrition Research Center, associated with the Baylor College of Medicine, also in Houston.

Long-term USDA Study Clears Soy Protein

Long-term consumption of ground beef with added soybean protein has no significant effect on the body's ability to absorb iron and zinc, according to USDA human nutrition researchers.

The USDA findings refute several earlier studies that suggested soy protein posed a health risk because it partially blocked the human body's ability to absorb these trace minerals. The body needs iron for red blood cell production and zinc for cell growth and repair.

Soy protein is widely used in the United States in infant formulas and as a meat extender in some foods in school lunch programs.

In a study of 52 households, the researchers found that both adults and children eating a diet containing soy protein showed either improved or unchanged iron and zinc levels after six months.

Each family received specially prepared "meat" patties that were eaten as the primary protein source in seven to nine meals each week. Seven kinds of patties were tested: all beef, beef with three types of soy protein and beef with three soy proteins fortified with iron and zinc. In all of the patties (except the all-beef) 20 percent of the protein came from soy and 80 percent from beef.

The researchers concluded that soy protein at the 20 percent dietary level poses no risk of soy-induced iron or zinc deficiency.

For more information, see Press Release #386-83, "Long-term USDA Study Clears Soy Protein."

USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service:

- Maintains USDA's Nutrient Data Bank;
 - Conducts the Nationwide Food Consumption Survey;
 - Monitors nutrient content of the U.S. food supply;
 - Provides nutrition guidelines for education and action programs;
 - Collects and disseminates food and nutrition materials; and
 - Conducts nutrition education research.
-

Fresh Fruits, Vegetables Show Summer Highs

Fresh vegetables and fruits -- salad lovers' delights -- account for a greater share of Americans' summer food dollars. The explanation, of course, is the plentiful supply of fresh produce at this time of year. Households use 72 percent more fresh vegetables and 61 percent more fresh fruits in summer than in winter. This trend reverses itself for processed vegetables and fruits, more of which are consumed in the winter than in the summer. No



matter what the season, however, the money spent on food at home remains about the same.

For more information on seasonal differences in food consumption, see: Food Consumption: Households in the United States, Seasons and Year 1977-78, Nationwide Food Consumption Survey Report No. H-6. This publication is available for \$8.50 from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Change in Sources of Zinc in American Food Supply

Researchers from USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service have found that the primary sources of the trace mineral zinc in the American food supply have shifted in the past 70 years. Foods of animal and vegetable origin provided almost equal amounts of zinc in the U.S. food supply until the mid-1930's. As eating patterns changed, foods of animal origin became more important sources of zinc. For the past two decades, they have provided approximately 70 percent of the total zinc in the food supply.

Since 1909, the meat, poultry and fish food groups have been the primary sources of zinc and, in recent years, have accounted for almost half of the total zinc in the food supply. The proportion of zinc contributed by dairy products has also increased over the years (to approximately 20 percent) making this group the second leading source of zinc. On the other hand, the proportion of zinc provided by grain products has decreased by one-half since the beginning of the century when it provided 27 percent of the total zinc.

For more information, see "Trends in Levels of Zinc in the U.S. Food Supply, 1909-1981," in the American Chemical Society publication Nutritional Bioavailability of Zinc.

Food Shopping Workshops Help Hold Down Food Cost

USDA is conducting workshops on "Making Food Dollars Count" to help families, especially those with low incomes, to obtain well-balanced, nutritious diets that they can afford. At the workshop, participants are given two weeks of sample meal plans consisting of menus, food lists and recipes. Food to prepare the meals for a family of four cost no more than \$58 per week.

USDA hopes that the workshops also encourage cooperative efforts among community groups and private companies, primarily retail grocery stores, to make shopping easier.

The workshops, which began in March and will continue through August, are being held in Atlanta, Dallas, New Brunswick, Chicago, Denver, Boston and San Francisco.

For more information, contact: Betty Peterkin, Deputy Director, Consumer Nutrition Division, HNIS, 6505 Belcrest Rd, Hyattsville, Md. 20872.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers:

- The food stamp program;
 - The national school lunch and school breakfast programs;
 - The special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children (WIC); and
 - The food distribution, child care food, summer food service and special milk programs.
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More Emergency Food Available to Needy People

Needy families can now receive more surplus foods at soup kitchens and food banks, according to an April 27 announcement by John Block, Secretary of Agriculture. These families will be given rice, flour, honey and corn meal, in addition to surplus cheese and butter already provided.

Emergency food facilities each month will distribute 25 to 35 million pounds of cheese, 10 million pounds of butter, 2 million pounds of corn meal, 2 million pounds of rice, 5 million pounds of nonfat dry milk and 5 million pounds of flour. The distribution for honey has not been determined.

Each state's share of these government-owned surplus commodities will depend on the number of unemployed persons and the number of persons living below the poverty level in the state.

USDA also plans to provide states with \$75 million worth of perishable commodities to help feed indigent people and \$50 million to store and distribute those commodities. Again, emergency food facilities will provide the food to eligible persons.

USDA has been distributing surplus food since December 1981, when it first supplied cheese to needy persons.

AMS Buys Food For Needy

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service is purchasing \$75 million worth of commodities for distribution to needy people in high unemployment areas.

The commodities, which will be provided to eligible persons through cooperative emergency feeding facilities, include canned beef, pork, poultry, dried egg mix, tuna and salmon, as well as fruit and vegetable products, such as canned applesauce, peaches, pears, grapefruit juice, pitted prunes, sweet potatoes, corn and white beans in tomato sauce. The specific items have been selected based on current and prospective supply conditions and on the need to provide shelf-stable items.

AMS is working with the National Marine Fisheries Service, a part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, to develop specification requirements and bid documents for the tuna and salmon.

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